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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2009

In Today's Papers

Opinion Surveys on March 29 Municipal Elections

Media outlets report predictions for this weekend's municipal elections from two leading polling companies, Konda and A&G, and note the poll conclusions diverge significantly. The latest Konda poll dated March 14-15 suggests the AKP will win 47.9 percent of the votes nationwide for provincial assemblies, and 44.6 percent in mayoral races -- a 4 percent rise over the 41.7 percent votes the AKP won in the 2004 local elections. The A&G Research Company, however, suggested the AKP's votes in Sunday's elections would drop to 39.1 percent. Konda's survey estimated the AKP would win 51.8 percent of the votes if general elections were held today. The A&G survey, however, gives the AKP only 42.5 percent in a general election -- less than the 46.6 percent it obtained in July 2007 general elections. The distribution of votes in March 29 elections predicted by the two companies would be as follows: Konda: AKP 47.9 percent, CHP 23.5, MHP 14.3, DTP 4.2, SP 3.7 A&G: AKP 39.8 percent, CHP 26.4, MHP 15.7, DTP 5.3, SP 5.2.

President Gul in Brussels

Sabah, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak, Vatan: Mainstream Sabah reports that yesterday President Gul held a meeting with European Commission President Barroso in Brussels to discuss ties between Turkey and the EU, Iraq, Afghanistan and energy issues.

Islamist-oriented Zaman quotes Gul as saying "EU reforms will further strengthen Turkey's economy and democracy." Mainstreams Hurriyet and Milliyet report that regarding the tax fine to Dogan Media Group, Barroso said that respect for freedom of the press is one of the fundamental values of the European Union and we attach great importance to it. We understand that in Turkey there are some problems with this issue. We are closely following the issue."

Iraq and Denmark Push the Button to Eliminate PKK

Mainstream Sabah reports that following the visit of President Gul to Iraq, the Iraqi Administration took a step forward to eliminate the PKK. In a statement yesterday, Iraqi National Security Minister Al-Vaili said the process to expel the PKK from Iraqi territory has already started and Washington, Ankara and Baghdad were exchanging intelligence in this process. The paper adds that Denmark also

might take steps to outlaw the broadcasts of PKK's mouthpiece Roj TV. Danish PM Rasmussen made arrangements to start legal steps against Roj TV. Within this framework, a Danish prosecutor came to Ankara yesterday to gather information on the issue. Sabah notes that the goal of the move by Denmark is to ease Turkish reactions and to win Turkish support for the bid of Danish PM Rasmussen to take the post of NATO Secretary General.

International 'Kurdish Conference' to be Held in Erbil

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says in a news commentary that the forthcoming international "Kurdish Conference" in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil in late April or early May expects PKK participation. Kurdish sources in northern Iraq say it was not yet clear whether European countries will join the conference. If the conference calls on the PKK to lay down its arms, Ankara wants an "implementation mechanism" to see the terror organization disarmed, says Cumhuriyet. The paper adds the Erbil conference will be the first of a series of future conferences to be held on the Kurdish question.

Editorial Commentary on the PKK-Iraq/Turkey

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah: "The upcoming Kurdish Conference will be held in Erbil most likely in late April or early May. However all is not going smoothly regarding the conference preparation. President Gul described the initiative as an indication that "everybody is working to resolve the issue" while FM Babacan emphasized Turkey does not want this platform turning into a propaganda venue for a terrorist organization. As for the PKK, the organization was not enthusiastic about attending this conference

ANKARA 00000476 002 OF 002

until imprisoned leader Ocalan gave his green light for attendance.

Now, the PKK has started asking for a general amnesty for PKK militants, including Ocalan, and want pardoned militants to become an armed group under Ocalan. Given such insane demands, it is obvious that the problem cannot be resolved overnight."

Yasin Dogan wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "There are strong dynamics both internally and externally to resolve the PKK problem. However, significant expectations, including a time frame to finish off the PKK, are being created by some circles as if a miracle is about to happen. Extreme patience and maturity is advised because realism is necessary to resolve this issue."

Editorial Commentary on Turkey-EU

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "President Gul's trip to Brussels is a clear indication of the state's determination to return to the EU process. We can now expect to see steps to upgrade democratic standards after the elections."

Taha Akyol wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "In Brussels, President Gul emphasized Turkey's policy priorities by being the first Turkish President ever to visit the EU capital. Likewise, he believes that the Europeans have also begun to realize Turkey's importance as a soft power in the region. Considering both, Turkey's EU process has good potential."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- In its 'Turkey report' to be released March 30, the US-based think-tank CSIS expects the AKP to come in first in the March 29 elections, but expects CHP, MHP and SP to increase their percentages in Sunday's voting.

- Political parties have cancelled their election rallies as the search for the BBP leader Muhsin Yazicioglu continues after his helicopter crashed Wednesday in Kahramanmaraş province. Although 3,000 rescuers are participating in the search operations, the wreckage of the helicopter has not yet been found.

- Gazprom Germany's project director Dietmer Schulz-Oral says they were planning to make new investments in Turkey.

- Caroline Atkinson, the IMF's external relations director, says talks with Turkey on a new stand-by deal continue.
- On Thursday, six people were injured when a group of pro-Kurdish DTP supporters attacked the AKP activists in Diyarbakir.

World

- Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian says the border with Turkey will be opened soon.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors fails to agree on a new director-general to head the UN nuclear watchdog.
- President Obama will travel to France on June 6 to attend commemorations of the Second World War D-Day landings.

JEFFREY